



Embassy of the United States of America

CLIMATE ACTION GOES LOCAL

California: Changing the Game on Climate

By Terry Tamminen



California led U.S. large wind farm development with installations such as the Sacramento Municipal Utility District 102 megawatt wind farm in Rio Vista, California. ©Getty Images

California's Global Warming Solutions Act of 2006 was passed to make a difference in California and the world. As head of the world's eighth-largest economy, then-Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger knew that California's policy approach to global warming could have an impact in the United States and around the world.

When we first proposed the legislation to California lawmakers, we encountered the typical opposition from industry groups that feared new mandates would result in higher costs for businesses. We ultimately proved, however, that measures to solve climate change — including energy efficiency, the development of renewable energy and

alternative transportation fuels, and carbon trading — would boost the economy and create thousands of new jobs.

California Inspiration

Since AB32 was enacted five years ago, other states in America have followed California's lead. Our state's climate policies have

inspired a majority of U.S. states to move forward on a range of climate change mitigation actions. Many states have developed climate action plans that include specific greenhouse gas reduction targets. They have also established renewable portfolio standards that require power producers to generate a certain portion of their energy from clean sources, and passed legislation that addresses transportation, energy efficiency and other climate-related needs.

Together, these efforts are having a significant impact on America's greenhouse gas emissions and helping the United States meet the nonbinding emissions target President Obama announced at the 2010 climate summit in Copenhagen: a 17 percent reduction below 2005 levels by 2020. In fact, U.S. emissions have been falling since 2007, mainly because of the economic recession. But in the future, these emissions are expected to grow much more slowly than they did in recent decades, thanks to current investments in renewable and clean technology and alternative fuels, the U.S. Department of Energy says.

California: An International Player

California's actions have also had an impact on policies overseas. In September 2009, California and more than 30 other U.S. states hosted the first Governors'

Global Climate Summit in Los Angeles, drawing some 1,200 participants from across the world. The summit focused on action being taken at the state and local level and how those actions are building environmentally sustainable economies while simultaneously reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

Meeting again the following year, Governor Schwarzenegger joined other prominent leaders at the summit to announce a new global organization, the R20-Regions of Climate Action (R20). The goal of R20 is to develop and implement low-carbon and climate-resilient projects through cooperation among local governments around the world. By building a new green economy, the group says, global carbon dioxide emissions can be reduced by 75 percent by 2020 and increases in Earth temperatures can be capped at 2 degrees Celsius — a goal scientists say will help us avoid catastrophic climate change.

The Momentum Holds Up

As expected, there have been some attempts to derail the momentum put in play by California's historic climate law. A proposition supported by oil companies was placed on the ballot in November 2010. Proposition 23 sought to freeze AB32 until California's unemployment rate dropped below a certain rate. California voters had their say at the polls, defeating Proposition 23 by a 24-percent margin, which says a lot about what is important to voters: a green economy, jobs and a healthy environment.

AB32 was a game-changing piece of legislation because it put into law a road map for comprehensive action on climate change. Having been involved in the drafting of that law and now witnessing the tangible impact it has had on inspiring action across the country and rest of the world, I'm more confident than ever that action taken at the state and local level will have a significant impact on lowering emissions.

California is doing its piece to try to halt climate change, a truly global problem.

This fuel station in San Francisco is one of about 200 that offer compressed natural gas for vehicles. ©AP Images





Staff inspect solar panels for Southern California Edison at Pacific Gas and Electric Company's solar energy site near Vacaville. Governor Jerry Brown signed legislation in 2011 that requires one-third of California electricity to come from renewable sources. ©AP Images

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